ISSN 1822-6736 (spausdintas)
ISSN 2538-6778 (internetinis)
https://doi.org/10.7220/2538-6778.2023.26
Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų vadybos ir ekonomikos jaunųjų mokslininkų Konferencijų darbai 2023 / 26

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The Theoretical Analysis of the Influence of Instagram Travel Influencers on Gen Z's Tourism Consumption

Introduction

The rise of Web 3.0 has significantly impacted marketing strategies, moving away from sales-oriented approaches to prioritizing emotional connections with target audiences. Building long-term, emotionally driven relationships with these audiences has become a critical aspect of modern marketing. Influencer marketing exemplifies the effectiveness of this approach, as consumers tend to trust the recommendations of third parties more than those of the brand itself (Brown, 2013). Influencers, especially those with a large and dedicated following, can drive website traffic, increase social media visibility, and boost sales by sharing personal experiences with the brand's offerings (Brown & Fioerella, 2013). Through influencer-sponsored content, brands can achieve increased sales, heightened brand awareness, and foster trusted relationships between influencers and their communities.

According to Statista (2023), the global influencer marketing industry reached an impressive value of US$16.4 billion in 2022, representing a significant increase of over 100% since 2019. Furthermore, it is projected that influencer marketing budgets will continue to grow in the coming years. Among the various platforms, Instagram is the most widely utilized for influencer marketing (IMW, 2022). This platform's significance is underscored by its user base of 1.07 billion and the presence of over 3.8 million brand-sponsored influencer posts in 2021 (Geyser, 2023). What sets influencers apart from the general population is their perceived reliability. Consumers tend to place greater trust in information and advice from advertisements and their immediate circle when making purchasing decisions (Sammis, 2016). Social media influencers are viewed as credible sources by their followers due to their authenticity (Arslan, 2015). While influencer marketing initially focused on beauty, fashion, and style, it has now expanded to almost every field, including travel and tourism. The dynamic nature of the tourism sector necessitates adapting to changing market conditions and developing unique marketing approaches. In recent years, it has been recognized that influencer marketing strategies utilizing social media platforms can shape consumer purchasing decisions, making it a significant tool in the tourism industry, and by leveraging influencer marketing, tourism destinations, hospitality industries, events, and festivals aim to attract diverse types of tourists from various markets and shape their perceptions of the destination (Femenia-Serra, et al., 2020). According to Statista Market Forecast (2023), the global online travel market was valued at $432 billion in 2021, experiencing a 10.4% increase from the previous year. Understanding the impact of influencer marketing on different generations is crucial, especially for the highly influential and dynamic Gen Z group, which comprises 26% of the world's population and predominantly uses social media for researching shopping options. Due to their preference for authenticity, personalization, and social responsibility, Gen Z is receptive to influencer marketing. However, it is important to note that there is a lack of theoretical research in the tourism industry regarding the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z.

Therefore, this **study aims** to address this gap by conducting a theoretical analysis of the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's travel behavior.

To achieve this aim, the study will conduct a literature review, which involves a comprehensive analysis of the relevant literature on the topic. The literature review will include studies on the effectiveness of influencer

marketing in the tourism industry, the impact of social media on Gen Z's purchasing decisions, and the characteristics of Gen Z that make them receptive to influencer marketing.

The research object is the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's travel behavior, and the goal is to conduct a theoretical analysis of this impact. The problem is the lack of theoretical research in the tourism industry on the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on influencer marketing in the tourism industry and provide insights into the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's travel behaviour.

The concept of influencer and influencer marketing in case of Instagram

Influencer marketing is a technique that utilizes social media and social influencers to meet an organization's marketing and business needs (Brown et al., 2013). Scholars have defined influencer marketing from various perspectives with sharing a common thread: the use of influential individuals to convey brand messages and create emotional connections with consumers. In today's digital age, influencer marketing benefits from the broad reach and rapid spread of content facilitated by social media. Unlike in the past, current influencer marketing is more natural and familiar, with promotions made through expressions of famous individuals. The reach of influencers extends to various social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. Studies have shown that consumers make purchases based on products they see promoted by influencers they follow on social media channels (Geyser, 2023).

Consequently, influencer marketing has gained popularity, with the global market value surpassing $13.8 billion in 2021 (Statista, 2021). Brands can achieve a $5.78 return on investment for every $1 spent on influencer marketing, and 67% of brands utilize Instagram for this purpose (Geyser, 2023). Bailis (2019) reports that 19% of businesses spend $1K-$10K per year, 18% spend $100K-$500K per year, and 7% plan to invest over $1M. This marketing approach has gained particular significance in e-commerce, fashion, gaming, and travel industries, with 17% of companies dedicating over half of their marketing budgets to influencer marketing. Travel influencers play a crucial role in tourists' decision-making processes, as they are perceived as reliable sources (Gretzel, 2018). Travel influencers produce content tailored for niche audiences, offering travel tips, brand reviews, recommended destinations, and itineraries. Brands and businesses collaborate with influencers who appeal to their target audience, share common interests, and use relatable language. These collaborations positively impact visitors' inclination to purchase travel-related products or services (Akdeniz & Kömürcü, 2021). The sharing of vacation experiences by travel bloggers through photos and videos has a particularly influential effect on young people (Başarangil, 2019). Influencer marketing serves as an essential tool for the tourism and travel industry, enabling them to achieve their goals and promote their offerings (Gretzel, 2018).

Among Gen Z, Instagram is a popular social media platform that facilitates instant sharing of pictures using smartphones. Young people spend more time on Instagram than on Facebook, bridging the physical and digital worlds (Volo & Irimias, 2020). Instagram travel influencers are a distinct category of objective third-party celebrity endorsement that shapes viewers' impressions through articles, comments, videos, and other Instagram content. Utilizing Instagram travel influencers in marketing strategies enables brands to establish positive connections with their customers. The effectiveness of Instagram travel influencers relies on the quality of the content they produce through blogs, posts, or videos (Cassia & Magno, 2018). Different categories of influencers allow them to effectively reach their target audiences and become influential figures whose ideas and opinions are valued over time. Travel influencers create content tailored for niche audiences, and they are expected to manage their accounts with an emphasis on originality and authenticity. Research has demonstrated that social media influencers have an impact on their followers' travel intentions, influence the decision-making process, and enhance the perceived trust of individuals (Ong, 2022). It is worth noting that the most followed influencer content predominantly revolves around fashion, beauty, gaming, travel, and lifestyle (Geyser, 2023), and there are 624 million Instagram posts focused on travel (Ong, 2022). According to Ramonet (2011), the credibility of travel influencers stems from their distinctive, non-commercial, and personal identities. In summary, influencer marketing has gained significant popularity in recent years, with a global market value surpassing $13.8 billion in 2021. Travel influencers play a crucial role in tourists' decision-making processes and are perceived as trustworthy sources. They produce niche content, including travel tips, brand reviews, recommended destinations, and itineraries. Instagram, a popular social media platform among Generation Z, facilitates instant sharing of travel pictures using smartphones. Travel influencers positively impact visitors'

inclination to purchase tourism-related products or services. Their credibility arises from the distinct, non-commercial, and personal identities they create.

The phenomenon of tourism consumption

According to Köseoğlu et al. (2016), the number of studies in tourism literature began to increase in the early 2000s, with research focusing on general trends in tourism, academic articles, and trends and orientations of tourism. In recent years, the tourism sector has become a developing sector that contributes to the country's economy through foreign currency inflows, the increase in confidence in the countries that come to tourists, the increase in the flow of money, and employment (Dwyer et al., 2019). Tourism consumption, which includes transportation, accommodation, food, and beverages, leisure activities, shopping, and other tourist goods and services, is an essential component of the tourism industry, creating jobs, generating tax revenue, and contributing to infrastructure development (Buhalis & Law, 2008). However, it is heterogeneous and complex due to its intangible, perishable, and indistinguishable characteristics (Xiang, Du, Ma, & Fan, 2017).

The tourism demand is elastic and raised by variations in travel motives, which may lead to the abandonment of tourism in situations affecting the public (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). Motivational factors underlying travel are curiosity and the desire to discover (Pearce, 1982). The external and intrinsic factors affecting the development of tourism are the proliferation of means of transportation, rise in the level of economic welfare, urbanization and population growth in cities, increase in disposable income, and peace in most of the world (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Intrinsic factors include curiosity, business, sports, religious reasons, culture, education, and training, rest and recreation, health and treatment, and visiting friends and relatives (Leiper, 1979). The decision-making process in tourism possesses unique characteristics, and marketers need to analyze tourists as consumers in stages of problem-solving and decision-making (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2014). The consumer's decision-making process for purchasing is often examined using a framework consisting of five stages: emergence of a need, identification of available options, evaluation of options, decision to purchase, and post-purchase behavior (Engel & Miniard, 1995). Marketers should analyze tourists as consumers in these stages to develop effective tourism marketing strategies and understand how to impact consumers at each stage of the decision-making process. The success of promotional activities plays a crucial role in enabling tourists to make choices comfortably and as they desire (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In summary, tourism consumption is an important economic activity that contributes significantly to a destination's economy. The decision to engage in tourism activities is influenced by a combination of external and intrinsic factors such as the desire for relaxation, exploration, and personal growth. Tourists undergo a decision-making process that includes various stages such as information search, evaluation of alternatives, and post-purchase evaluation. Marketers can impact this process by providing accurate and compelling information, highlighting unique experiences, and addressing consumer concerns. Overall, tourism consumption plays a crucial role in the development and sustainability of many destinations around the world.

The characteristics of Gen Z

Gen Z refers to the demographic cohort born in the late 1990s or early 2000s, characterized by their exposure to digital technology, the internet, and social media. Scholars generally agree that individuals born after 1995 fall into the Gen Z category (Arslan, 2015). The rise of internet communication during this period marked the beginning of Gen Z, coinciding with the emergence of internet entrepreneurship in America and Europe (Yelkikalan, 2010).

Gen Z's lifestyles, consumption habits, and characteristics have been significantly influenced by the advancements in information technology since the mid-1990s (Yelkikalan et al., 2010). Growing up in close association with technology, Gen Z members are confident users of modern technologies, preferring emojis over verbal communication and spending more time on computers than reading books (Ayhün, 2013). They perceive virtual spaces as more valuable than the outdoors. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z sees technology as a tool for leisure, entertainment, socialization, and entrepreneurship. Their familiarity with technology enables them to become active consumers quickly, but it also presents a challenge for marketers as they lack brand loyalty. However, this behavior can be advantageous as peer influence significantly impacts Gen Z's purchasing decisions (Arslan, 2015). Instagram is the preferred social media platform for Gen Z, with over 64%

using it daily, making it the most popular platform for 73% of Gen Z adults (Lashbrook, 2019; Green, 2019). Personalized interaction and the influence of social media influencers play a crucial role in their purchasing behavior (Chang, 2019). Gen Z follows more than 10 social media influencers and is highly likely to purchase products or services recommended by their favorite influencers (Chang, 2019). In summary, Gen Z, also known as Digital Natives, comprises 83 million people in the US alone, wielding an annual purchasing power of 200 billion dollars. Born between 1995 and 2010, Gen Z differs from previous generations in their shopping methods, relying heavily on influencers' emotions, thoughts, and experiences before making a purchase. YouTube and Instagram influencers play a significant role in their purchasing decisions, establishing one-on-one communication, gaining trust, and providing instant information about products and services. Brands can reach Gen Z effectively through these influencers, reducing the need for traditional advertising methods. Companies should focus on marketing their products on social media platforms, creating interactive online channels for marketing and sales to capture and engage with these young consumers. The influence of social media influencers on Gen Z's purchasing decisions is well-documented, highlighting their critical role in connecting brands with their target audiences. Gen Z is more inclined to trust influencer recommendations over traditional advertisements, necessitating companies to adapt their marketing strategies to the virtual media environment and collaborate with social media influencers to enhance brand awareness.

The relation between Gen Z and tourism consumption

The emergence of radio, television, and Information Communication Technologies transformed the way consumers plan and choose travel-related products (Chung & Koo, 2015). Presently, social media has become the primary source of information for consumers, allowing them to share their experiences with others (Ayeh et al., 2013). Targeting specific groups of tourists, instead of treating the entire market as homogeneous, is crucial for tourism professionals (Pennington-Gray et al., 2003).

The theory of generation cohorts has been extensively applied to the tourism industry, revealing differences in destination preferences and vacation activities among different generational cohorts (Lehto et al., 2008). Understanding the unique characteristics of each generation cohort is essential for tourism professionals to design and implement effective strategies. Gen Z has emerged as a lucrative tourist market with significant purchasing power and plays a critical role in family decision-making processes (Gaumer & Arnone, 2010). Furthermore, Gen Z experiences FOMO, or the fear of missing out, making digital influencers a crucial marketing tool in this market. The tourism industry recognizes the significance of Gen Z as a leading consumer group due to their strong inclination towards travel (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). It is worth noting that Gen Z's travel motives differ from those of previous generations and are diverse. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing their travel preferences and decisions is critical for tourism stakeholders aiming to attract and retain this market segment. Demeter and Bratucu (2014) identified six types of youth tourism: educational tourism, volunteering, work and travel, cultural exchange, sports and adventure tourism, and leisure tourism. These different types of tourism cater to the specific interests and preferences of Gen Z. Eusébio and Carneiro (2015) segmented the student travel market into four groups based on motivations and interactions: culture lovers, fun lovers, sun and beach lovers, and nature lovers. Moreover, Gen Z tourists have distinct characteristics (Niemczyk, 2019). They were born in an era of technological advancement, blurring the line between the real and virtual world. Thus, tourism offers an opportunity for them to break away from online reality and experience social values in real life. Gen Z is also known for being open-minded when it comes to travel. Geographical barriers fade away with the internet, and they often possess foreign language skills and adapt easily to multicultural environments, facilitating global connections. Lastly, Gen Z is unafraid of distance and actively seeks journeys abroad to broaden their horizons.

The purposes of travel among Gen Z have significantly influenced the travel industry (Schiopu et al., 2016). This generation seeks new experiences, cultural immersion, work opportunities, educational experiences, visits to family and friends, language learning, and participation in events, among other reasons. To cater to Gen Z, the tourism industry must understand their characteristics and preferences (Schiopu et al., 2022). Budget-consciousness is a common trait among Gen Z tourists, as they search for promotions, cheap flights, and last-minute peer-to-peer accommodations. They prefer unique and unconventional experiences over traditional tourist hotspots. City breaks and weekend getaways are favored by Gen Z tourists, as they prefer shorter trips to longer, more luxurious travel options. They enjoy visiting authentic locations and actively seek opportunities to

socialize with locals and other travelers. Gen Z predominantly travels with friends or family and relies heavily on online information sources and recommendations from various social groups to plan their travels (Schiopu et al., 2016). Additionally, they are highly engaged in social media and utilize it as a primary source of inspiration for their travel plans. Overall, understanding the travel characteristics of Gen Z is vital for the tourism industry to effectively market and cater to this generation of travelers. By considering their budget-consciousness, preference for unique experiences, and reliance on digital platforms, tourism professionals can develop targeted strategies to attract and engage Gen Z tourists.

Conclusions

Gen Z tourists, which primarily consist of smartphone users, prefer Instagram as their main social media platform, followed by Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. They spend a significant amount of time on social media and use it to acquire information pre-travel and plan their trips. Budget is an essential element in their travel decisions, and they prefer to make their reservations through online channels. According to YouGov, traveling ranks third on Gen Z's list of planned expenditures for the upcoming year, after dining out and clothing. Domestic vacations are preferred due to the pandemic, and budget plays a crucial role in their travel decisions. Airbnb is the most critical travel brand for Gen Zers, and they show a strong interest in traveling with a purpose, such as eco-tourism and volunteering. Gen Zers are more interested in connecting with local people and their traditions and experiencing local food during their vacations.

Social media influencers are a significant factor in Gen Z's travel decisions, with Instagram being the primary source of travel inspiration. They seek unique and memorable experiences to share with peers on social media. Hotels and tourist destinations should cater to the needs of young tourists by creating youth clubs and promoting the recreational potential of each destination. Adventure tourism is becoming increasingly popular among Gen Z tourists, and tourism practitioners should invest in web advertisement and e-WOM control to promote positive reviews and respond to negative ones. Gen Z tourists prefer short trip durations, engage in various activities, and view the tourism experience as a means of escaping their daily routine, seeking empowerment and socialization. In conclusion, this study has explored the influence of influencer marketing on Gen Z's travel behavior through a comprehensive theoretical analysis. The findings highlight the significant role that travel influencers, particularly on platforms like Instagram, play in shaping the travel decisions of Gen Z tourists. With a strong preference for budget-friendly options and a reliance on online channels for planning and reservations, Gen Z is an important demographic for tourism enterprises to understand and cater to. Moreover, this study has shed light on Gen Z's desire for unique and meaningful travel experiences, their interest in connecting with local culture, and their inclination towards adventure tourism. By recognizing these preferences and tailoring marketing strategies accordingly, hotels, tourist destinations, and other stakeholders in the tourism industry can effectively engage and attract Gen Z tourists.

Overall, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on influencer marketing and Gen Z's travel behavior, providing valuable insights for industry practitioners and furthering our understanding of this dynamic and influential demographic.

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THE THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF INSTAGRAM TRAVEL INFLUENCERS ON GEN Z'S TOURISM CONSUMPTION

Summary

In response to the increasingly challenging and competitive business landscape, companies have recognized the importance of social media in differentiating themselves from others. With the growing amount of time people spend on social media platforms, businesses, particularly in the tourism industry, are capitalizing on influencer partnerships to enhance their visibility. Influencers, who possess significant sway over the opinions and preferences of their followers, have become a valuable asset for destinations, hospitality industries, events, and festivals. Despite the rising use of influencer marketing in the tourism sector, there is a dearth of research on how Instagram travel influencers impact Gen Z's tourism consumption. The main question addressed in this paper is the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. The objective is to examine this impact through a theoretical analysis. By analyzing existing literature, scientific sources, and conducting a theoretical analysis, including the evaluation of influencers, influencer marketing, and Gen Z's perception of influencer marketing and tourism, this research aims to provide insights into why tourism enterprises should prioritize influencer marketing to attract this demographic.

Keywords: influencer marketing, tourism, Instagram travel influencers, Gen Z, influencer effect on Gen Z.